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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BRUSSELS 001047

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STATE FOR EUR/WE, EUR/RPM, SCA/A AND SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE
HOLBROOKE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/29/2019

TAGS: PREL MARR PGOV AF BE

SUBJECT: SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE HOLBROOKE'S JULY 28 MEETING
WITH BELGIAN FOREIGN MINISTER YVES LETERME

REF: A. BRUSSELS 830
B. BRUSSELS 1023

Classified By: Acting Political Economic Counselor Robert Kiene, reason
1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard Holbrooke met on July 28 with Yves Leterme, newly appointed Foreign Minister of Belgium. Holbrooke urged the GOB to ensure that the Belgian public understands how important operations in Afghanistan are to Belgian, European and American security. Leterme admitted the GOB could do more in that regard. Holbrooke said that ISAF will need to be active beyond 2010 to accomplish its goals. Leterme said that the GOB will consider extending its troop commitment at an appropriate time. Coordination of assistance in Afghanistan is a problem the USG is working with the UN to solve, Holbrooke said. For now, he concluded, humanitarian assistance to internally displaced persons in Pakistan is a desperate need, to which Belgium is welcome to contribute.
End Summary.

¶2. (C) Leterme told Holbrooke that Belgium considers it important to share the burdens of regional and global security with other NATO members. While the U.S. effort in Afghanistan is far larger, Belgium is contributing 500-600 troops to operations in Kunduz, Kandahar and Kabul. Holbrooke replied that the United States is grateful for Belgium's military contributions. Besides helping to secure the country, he said, Belgian participation is important to gaining the support of the Afghan people. Security operations need to be seen as an international and not siThe mission is a test o Leter knows that casualties aid that te conflict in Afghanistan will continue beyond 2010 and Belgium's support beyond that date will be needed. Leterme said that the GOB will consider further extending its commitment at the appropriate time. He said that the decision to increase Belgium's involvement in Afghanistan was one of the first decisions he took as Prime Minister in 2008. The government did not take time then to prepare public opinion, and it has work to do in that regard, he said. He mentioned that Belgians are concerned about narcotics production and trafficking originating in the region. Leterme thanked Holbrooke for any help the U.S. Embassy in Brussels and the USG in Washington can offer in terms of educating the public, but recognized that the government has to do most of the work itself. Holbrooke informed Leterme that the USG is changing its counter-narcotics strategy from crop eradication to interdiction of production and marketing of narcotics. The new strategy is proving more effective than the old one, he said.

5. (C) Leterme asked Holbrooke how effective the coordination of international reconstruction and development assistance is in Afghanistan. Holbrooke responded that progress on the ground has been made, especially in the areas of health and education. Six to eight million students now attend school,

including 2-3 million girls, he noted. The focus of assistance is now turning to agriculture. While the United Nations was asked early on to play a coordinating role for international assistance, it has had difficulty gathering information on programs, he said, and added that coordinating assistance is more difficult than coordinating military operations because the UN is not a command like ISAF. The USG wants to encourage the UN to be more active and will begin sharing information more fully with it, he said.

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¶6. (C) Holbrooke explained to Leterme that he and the USG prefer to think of the future in Afghanistan in terms of a "success strategy" rather than an "exit strategy." The United States and others cannot simply walk out on Afghanistan, he said. The country has been always strategically important and continues to be so. The USG aims to build up Afghan institutions so it can begin removing troops. This goal requires increasing the size of the Afghan National Army (ANA) even beyond the currently planned 134,000 troops and providing additional training to it. Holbrooke continued that the ANA is the most respected institution in Afghanistan, but the National Police is a problem. Many police officers are illiterate, drug-addicted, ill-trained and corrupt, he said. Holbrooke noted that a consortium of European Gendarmeries is sending 200 trainers. (Embassy note: Belgium does not have a gendarmerie such as exists in France or Italy. It is considering sending a handful of police trainers to join the EUPOL-Afghanistan mission. See Ref A.)

¶7. (C) Holbrooke said that right now, the situation in Pakistan is more critical than in Afghanistan. There will be no success in Afghanistan without success in Pakistan, he said. There has been some progress, in that the insurgency in the West of the country is being brought under control, a key leader in Swat has been arrested and radio stations that have broadcast threats from the insurgents have been shut down. However, he said, Pakistan's electrical system is a disaster. Most important, there are 2.5 to three million internally displaced persons (IDP's) in the country that desperately need humanitarian relief. UNHCR is hard pressed to cope with the situation, he said. The USG is paying half of all aid to the IDP's, Holbrooke said, and more is needed. Belgian assistance in that regard would help with the overall problems in the region, he suggested.

¶8. (U) Ambassador Holbrooke's staff has cleared this telegram.

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